

Information Confrontation in Great Power Competition

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About the project

- Expansion of work on RU information confrontation strategy
- Main research question: What is the role of information confrontation in great power competition?
- Scope: “Red” (RU and CH) strategic thinking about information confrontation
- Purpose: Inform U.S. and allied policy discussions about defending against and responding to information confrontation
- Goal: Develop an ends-ways-means framework for information confrontation in great power competition

Defining information confrontation

- Information confrontation [*informatsionnoe protivoborstvo*, or IPb] is the *Russian* term for conflict in the information domain ^[DIA]
 - Includes diplomatic, economic, military, political, cultural, social, and religious measures
 - 2 types of measures: informational-technical (e.g., cyber) and informational-psychological (e.g., disinformation)
 - Designed to shape perceptions and manipulate behavior of the target
- I argue that this term is suitable to describe Chinese behavior in and strategic thinking about the information domain

RU and CH similarities: ends

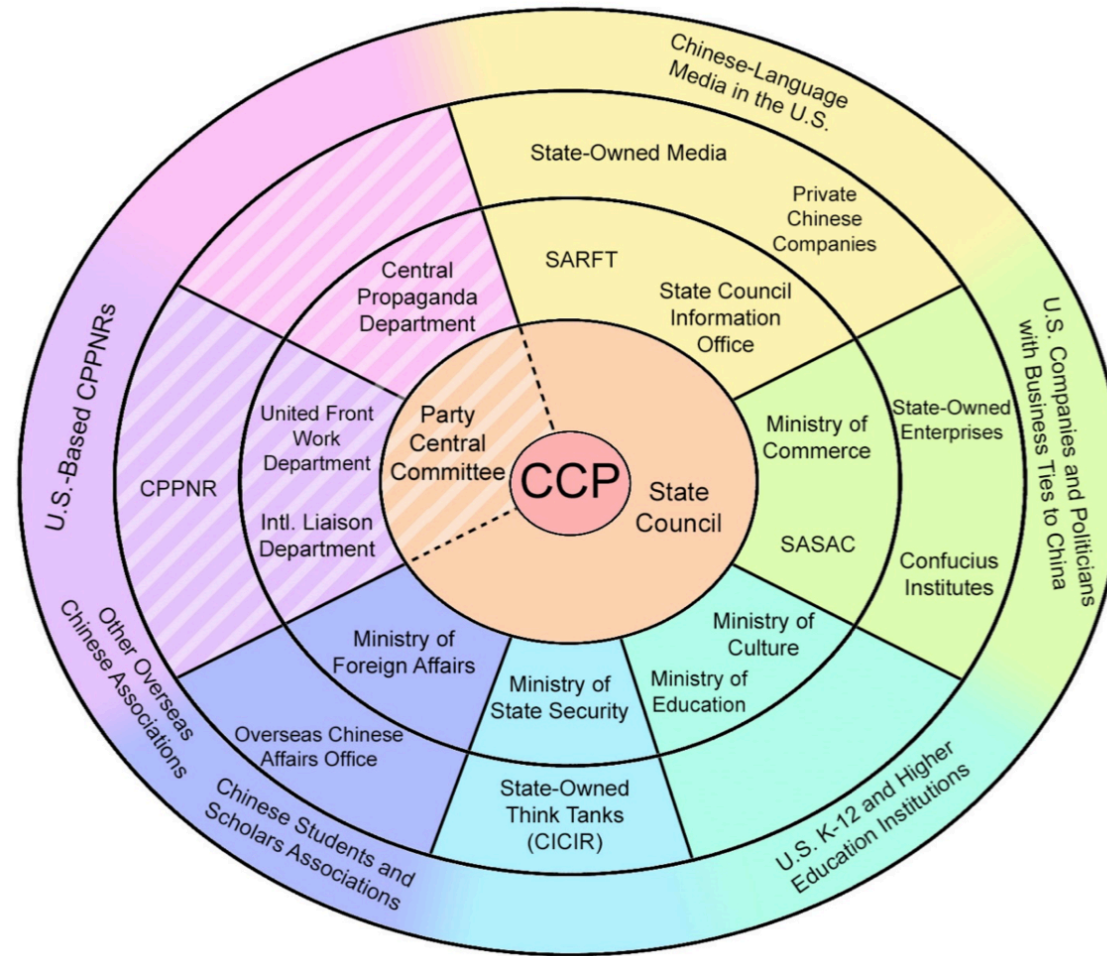
- Historically similar thinking about the character of conflict
 - Conflict is constant (shared historical experience with Marxism-Leninism)
 - Win without fighting (Sun Tzu)
- The importance of the information domain in 21st century conflict
 - IPb plays a role across the entire peacetime-wartime spectrum [Gerasimov]
 - IPb occurs in the information domain while also cutting across and linking multiple domains
 - Information superiority crucial to winning wars, particularly in the initial stages of conflict
 - CH 2015 PLA reforms, creation of Strategic Support Force [Costello and McReynolds, 11-12, 35-40]
 - IPb is an effective asymmetric, indirect, and economical counter-measure to U.S. military superiority

RU and CH differences: ways

Influence + Interference (RU) vs Influence (CH)

1. **RU** promotes chaos to discredit and distract adversaries and slow down decision-making, especially when it cannot control the narrative, while **CH** is more risk-averse and prefers to silence dissent by discrediting views that are critical of the Chinese system and promoting views that align with those of the CCP.
2. **RU** demonstrates propensity towards covert methods, while **CH** prefers to propagate its preferred narratives overtly [Mattis]
 - **CH's** influence apparatus is alarmingly large, complex, and overt, while **RU's** is primarily covert with the overt components of a comparatively smaller scale
 - CH concept of the “Three Warfares” [Wortzel]
 - CH focuses on “guiding” overseas Chinese (approximately 10 million in 2015) to support the CCP agenda, promote non-critical views of CH, and “tell China’s story” [Brady, 4, 34-36; Parello-Presner and Li, 11]
 - CH seeks to coopt foreign nationals through economic means [Brady, 8-9]
3. **RU** willing to take U.S. head-on, while **CH** exercises restraint and prefers instead to peel away at U.S. alliances and influence
 - CH can free-ride on RU interference efforts

CH influence apparatus



[Parello-Presner and Li, 13]

RU and CH differences: means

Economics, demographics, and risk propensity

- CH long-term outlook arguably more viable due to economics and demographics—“war of attrition” (CH) vs “disruption” (RU) [Parelllo-Presner and Li, 15-16]
- Yet RU long-term outlook arguably equally as viable because it:
 - (1) relies on cost-effective methods of influence and interference
 - Putin: ““We must consider the plans and development trajectories of the armed forces in other countries. We must be aware of perspective innovations. However, we must not chase after quantitative indicators...Our response must be based upon intellectual superiority. It will be asymmetric and less costly.” [Message to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 10 May 2006]
 - (2) demonstrates a higher risk tolerance than CH

IPb in great power competition

Ends	Ways	Means
Regime (RU)/Party (CH) stability	Control (domestically) and shape (internationally) strategic narratives and perceptions overtly and covertly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence operations (RU and CH) • Interference operations (RU) • “Three warfares” (CH) • “Reflexive control” (RU) • “Effective control” (CH) 	Non-military: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic • Diplomatic • Political • Cultural • Social • Religious
Challenge international order		
Achieve political objectives without fighting		
Prevent conflict escalation beyond the grey zone		Military: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional • Non-traditional
Avoid open conflict with the U.S. (CH)	Deterrence Rapidly seize the initiative if threshold of conflict is reached	Risk propensity

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